

# Interview: Peter Fuller Vice President & General Manager, Medtronic South Africa, SADC & EAC

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*Peter Fuller*

*provides us with an update on the integration of Covidien businesses, and explains how Medtronic is bringing innovation to South African patients and contributing to the improvement of the South African healthcare. Fuller is Vice President & General Manager of Medtronic South Africa, SADC & EAC.*

**In January 2015, Covidien was bought by Medtronic, the global leader in medical technology in a USD 43 billion deal. What do you think made Covidien the right match for Medtronic and how has the business changed now that is part of the Medtronic group?**

Bringing the two organizations together is still a work in progress, but it will lead Medtronic and Covidien to become the largest medical devices company both in Africa and globally. Medtronic and Covidien were two similar organizations in terms of size, number of employees, and philosophy. The two organizations have, for instance, always concentrated their efforts on education and training. On a larger scale, Medtronic and Covidien have always strived to improve access to meaningful medical technologies and upgrade the healthcare system in our respective countries, thanks to our extraordinary portfolio of life-changing products. Philosophically, we are a values-driven organization, following the Medtronic mission written in 1960: "to contribute to human welfare by application of biomedical engineering in the research, design, manufacture, and sale of instruments or appliances that alleviate pain, restore health, and extend life".

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The Medtronic businesses particularly focus on cardiovascular and several non-communicable diseases. Our restorative therapies group of products concentrates on two main areas: spine and neuromodulation implants, which essentially aim to restore nervous disorders. There is also our diabetic business, which notably includes diabetic pumps. People with diabetes of type 1 have fluctuations of blood sugar rate and they are affected by a lot of complications in their daily life. Talking about life-changing products, we are just about to launch a new product called 640 G, which is the closest thing to an artificial pancreas ever produced—having the ability to both monitor blood sugar rate and deliver insulin.

On the Covidien side of business, products are mainly related to surgery, from neurological surgery to cancer treatment, providing patients with the whole spectrum of instrumentation that could change their lives. Our respiratory business focuses on intensive care, which encompasses a wide variety of ventilators, but we also offer people management or people monitoring products and deep vein thrombosis devices.

We are known for our life-changing innovations and groundbreaking medical technology. That legacy—along with our broad portfolio, strong industry relationships, and respect for the human condition—enables us to play a central role in help shaping the healthcare industry.

**Medtronic is a global company with headquarters in Dublin and Minnesota. What is the strategic importance of the South African affiliate, both in terms of an African and global context?**

First of all, if we look at the South African context, the public sector absolutely requires further developments, whereas the private sector is already mature, well established, well resourced, and well-skilled, even if it roughly serves a population of 6 million people. Serving the other 50 million citizens of South Africa, the public sector represents some important opportunities for Medtronic, even if the funding is currently almost equally shared between the two sectors.

Furthermore, one of our main goals is to equip healthcare practitioners in the public sector with the proper resources and skillset through various partnerships with public institutions, and we have already been extremely active on this field. For instance, we are partnering with the Tygerberg Hospital in Cape Town to build training education centers for skills development in areas such as cardiology and neurosurgery. Training and education are probably the main differentiators between the medical device and pharmaceutical industries, as medical devices are relevant only in the hands of physicians or nurses who are skilled enough to fully unlock the products' capabilities. We have a considerable number of people solely dedicated to this training and education initiative—a legacy ambition that predates the acquisition for both Medtronic and Covidien.

The South African market obviously represents huge opportunities for both skills development and improving access to healthcare technologies. The main emphasis in many developing countries, notably South Africa, is on communicable diseases like TB or HIV, but non-communicable diseases are gradually gaining more and more traction on government and medical agendas, particularly with regard to cardiovascular diseases, oncology, and diabetes.

**We spoke with Vicky Atkinson, Strategic Director of the South African Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance, and she told us how unfortunately the government hasn't traditionally understood and appreciated the importance of tackling non-communicable diseases. Do you feel that government is changing in this regard?**

The government is undeniably placing a greater emphasis in this area. Primary health care and communicable diseases are obviously extremely important, but non-communicable diseases need to be addressed with the same strength. Nevertheless, funding has also always been an issue and

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continues to be an issue. Though, money aside, we need to first invest in the proper infrastructure and resources to materially impact the widespread awareness and treatment of such diseases

**In May 2015, the Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town became the first to implant the world's smallest pacemaker, the Medtronic Micra Transcatheter Pacing System (TPS), ahead of hospitals in Turkey, the Middle East and Central Asia. To this end, how successful are you in bringing innovation to South African patients?**

This pacemaker is one-tenth of the size of a regular pacemaker. This kind of achievement is undisputable evidence that South African cardiovascularists are world-class surgeons. We're always looking to push the frontier on innovation and introduce the most advanced products to the market, like for instance the new generation of heart-valves, which will be available in South Africa in less than 12 months.

Furthermore, we are significantly committed to many CSR projects in Johannesburg and South Africa, like the Medtronic Health Access Grant, which supports services for 25 children with diabetes in Johannesburg. In South Africa, the philanthropy team are developing and managing the company's philanthropic activities, and not only with respect to funds allocation, but also spreading the spirit of our charitable initiatives throughout the whole organization.

**For you Peter Fuller, as the Vice President & General Manager of Medtronic for South Africa, SADC & EAC, what is your five-year vision for Medtronic on the continent? On a personal side, what motivates you in your daily routine to reach these objectives?**

In five years' time, Medtronic will have a pivotal role in making groundbreaking treatments and technologies available to more people, regardless of location, income and status. Medtronic will help building integrated, value-based healthcare models in partnership with all healthcare stakeholders. Speaking specifically to South Africa, I am confident that crucial transformations will occur in the public sector—especially with regards to skills development and infrastructure. Furthermore, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the industry landscape will completely change in the coming years, as many other key healthcare stakeholders will continue to invest and strengthen their footprints in this region.

Personally, my main driver is that I know we are delivering life-changing solutions to people who really need them, and we take pride in bolstering patients' quality of life through our innovative technology solutions, as demonstrated by the pacemaker implant. Our efforts also have a beneficial impact on improving access for less-privileged people that may not possess the financial or physical means to undergo medical treatment. Ultimately, my motivating factor is steeped in the increasingly positive welfare that Medtronic's continued investments in the economy brings upon South African citizens everyday—no matter how trivial.

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